



Report of the Building Naming Task Force

1. The Example of Peer Institutions
2. Recommendation from the Building Naming Task Force
3. Report of the Subcommittee on Values: Principles for Renaming
 - A. Presumption: Renaming on account of values should be an exceptional event.
 - B. Principles to be considered: Sometimes renaming on the basis of values is warranted after consideration of these guiding questions.
 - C. Decisions to retain a name or to rename come with requirements of contextualization and process.
4. Report of the Subcommittee on Hébert and his Legacy
 - A. Hébert and Civil Rights
 - B. The Hébert Foundation Donation
 - C. Other Considerations and Recommendations Outside of Charge and Scope
5. Assessments
6. Recommendations

Appendix: F. Edward Hébert, Tulane and Beyond

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“In recent years, there has been a national conversation across the country and at Tulane about the criteria we should use for naming and renaming. In light of the importance of this issue, I decided it is imperative for us as a community to step back and examine our approach to the process. Obviously, any standard we adopt must be able to be applied in different situations with respect to a wide variety of individuals.”

“In your deliberations, I ask each member to play an active role in developing principles to inform our decisions in naming or renaming our buildings.”

“Once developed, I also ask the task force to rely on those guiding principles to provide a recommendation to the Board of Tulane, consistent with legal requirements, regarding Hebert Hall . . .”

Mike Fitts, June 25, 2020

1. The Example of Peer Institutions

Tulane University joins nationwide discussions about decisions to rename, remove, recontextualize, or keep names on campus buildings at a point when it can build upon a series of pioneering efforts by other institutions. We examined processes conducted at fifteen universities in different regions of the country, each of which faced distinctive historical legacies of discrimination, as well as efforts undertaken by other institutions such as Darren Walker’s and

names of buildings that were not changed and to recognize the importance of previously ignored contributions to the University by non-white members of its community.

- A. Presumptions: Renaming on account of values should be an exceptional event.
 - 1. There is a strong presumption against renaming a building on the basis of the values associated with its namesake. Such ~~an~~ renaming should be considered only in exceptional circumstances.

- B. Principles to be considered: Sometimes renaming on the basis of values is warranted after consideration of these guiding questions:
 - 1. Is a principal legacy of the namesake fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University?
 - 2. Was the relevant principal legacy significantly contested in the time and place in which the namesake lived?
 - 3. Did the University, at the time of a naming, honor a namesake for reasons that are fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University?
 - 4. Does a building whose namesake has a principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, or which was named for reasons fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, play a substantial role in forming community at the University?

- C. Decisions to retain a name or to rename come with requirements of contextualization and process.
 - 1. When a name is altered, the University has an obligation to ensure that the alteration is coupled with a description of the history of the original act of naming and the reason for the name change.
 - 2. When a name is retained, the University has an obligation to ensure that preservation does not have the effect of distorting history.
 - 3. The University will adopt a formal process for considering whether to alter a building name on account of the values associated with its namesake; such a

kind but agreed to a wing added to the History building.

In 1978, History faculty criticized the idea of memorializing the building after a segregationist, but their concerns were not directly addressed. In October 1979, the university held a public dedication ceremony for the renamed Hébert Building. In response, a group of Tulane students organized a petition with over 500 signatures protesting honoring Hébert because of his lifelong opposition to civil rights.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tulane's President Sheldon Hackney argued against "political criteria" in determining acceptance of memorialization and gifts.

Beginning in the mid-2000s, Students Organizing Against Racism (SOAR) began building a coalition of activists on campus that would work to recognize and respond to the history of racism at Tulane.

These efforts, intensified in the wake of Michael Brown's murder and the rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the national campaign to remove Confederate monuments, led a group of undergraduates in 2017-2018 to organize the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) and subsequently the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GAPSA) to formally vote for the removal of the Hébert name.

5. Task Force Assessments

Upon consideration of the recommendations and findings of the Subcommittee on Values and the Subcommittee on Hébert and his Legacy, the Building Naming Task Force came to the assessments presented in this section.

A.

Hébert described himself throughout his life as a patriot, an anti-communist, and an advocate for states' rights. Over his career, this resulted in attacks by him on those he viewed as Communists or Communist sympathizers and on efforts to legislate civil rights protections, things which he argued were fundamentally intertwined.

He opposed national civil rights efforts, including the inclusion of a civil rights plank in the 1948 Democratic Party platform, all congressional civil rights legislation from voting rights to anti-lynching laws—and Supreme Court decisions like *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Hébert usually framed this as a defense of “states’ rights.” And with desegregation at the forefront in the 1960s, Hébert publicly declared, “I am definitely, emphatically and positively in favor of segregation, and opposed to integration, period.”

Hébert did not disavow or moderate his strong stand in favor of segregation or in favor of “states’ rights.” He adhered to those views at a time when Tulane University was moving forward with integration. His views were directly and markedly opposed to the mission and principles of Tulane University.

- B. Was the relevant principal legacy significantly contested in the time and place in which the namesake lived?

Hébert’s views on segregation, states’ rights and civil rights may have reflected a majority view of his constituents - obviously enough to get him reelected to successive terms in the House of Representatives. But those views were contested locally. ~~There is~~ ^{There is} no evidence of significant protest at the time of naming the property in Belle Chasse, Louisiana as the ~~Belle Chasse~~ ^{Belle Chasse} Riverside Research Center. Significant concern was expressed by faculty and students at the time of the

D. Does a building whose namesake has a principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, or which was named for reasons fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, play a substantial role in forming community at the University?

The answer must be a resounding "yes"! And it is particularly so in this case. The building currently bearing Hebert's name is a prominent building on the academic quad. The building is physically and academically central to the lives of many of the students at Tulane University. It is difficult to explain to students, faculty, staff, alumni and visitors how a name so directly contrary to the principles and values of Tulane University can be allowed to remain on that building.

It is particularly ironic that his name is affixed to the building that is the home of the History Department, the Africana Studies program

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